

STUART EARP WATCHES CARDIFF BEAT MILLWALL AND SAYS . . .

Mammoth task facing the Blues at Ninian Park

WYCOMBE Wanderers face one of the most difficult games in the history of the club tomorrow at Ninian Park. That's my verdict after watching Cardiff City convincingly beat Millwall at the Den on Saturday.

The final score was 3-1 but Cardiff's superiority is not truly reflected in the scoreline. Let's get a few things straight from the start.

(a) It is not easy to judge any side on one performance. (b) Millwall were extremely disappointing outfit and this was, according to local pressmen, one of their poorest displays of the season.

(c) Cardiff were playing away from home and are likely to attack far more at Ninian Park tomorrow.

Taking those three factors into account, there's no getting away from a general impression that City are an extremely competent side. They play a brand of simple football and above all, they have managed to cut down their errors to a minimum. They won't try a 50 yard pass if it is safer to play the ball 20 yards.

The Welshmen work essentially as a team although they have three top performers in each department. All three players were astute signings by manager Jimmy Andrews.

In defence there is the formidable figure of Mike England,

the way he snuffed out the threat of Welsh colleague Ron Davies was impressive and although approaching the end of his career, he has still much to offer the game at this level. In the air he looks almost invincible and Wycombe's forwards will do well if they win a handful of the aerial battles.

The midfield department is run by Doug Livermore, the former Norwich player. He makes sure midfield is ticking over and keeps both John Buchanan and Gil Reece working at top pace. The non-stop running of all three was mainly responsible for Saturday's victory at the Den.

Upright, Cardiff have three contrasting forwards, Adrian Alston, who played for Australia in the last World Cup, is big and strong but does not play as the conventional target man. He has pace, too, when he gets into his

stride and his goal tally in recent games is impressive. Inside him is centre forward Tony Evans — another signing by Andrews. Evans must have covered every blade of grass at Millwall and he gets up very well for a small player. He scored the third goal which was just reward for one of the hardest working players on the pitch.

SUPERB ANDERSON

But the man who really destroyed Millwall on Saturday — and the player who could so easily do the same to Wanderers was Willie Anderson. Formerly with Manchester United and Villa, he is one of the most skilful wingers in the third division and made mincemeat of both full backs at the Den. He switches wings every now and then and if given a yard's space, he will be past a defender and sending over a pin-point cross. I

rate him as Cardiff's most talented and dangerous player.

Jimmy Andrews has managed to harness the varying talents of England, Livermore and Anderson. He has supported them with players who work hard and keep within their limits. The spirit of a successful side was plain to see on Saturday and was an object lesson to Millwall. They were often at loggerheads with each other during the game blaming each other for errors. When a Cardiff man erred, a wave of the hand in apology dismissed most incidents simply.

Millwall's plight was personified in Alan Welsh, who incidentally played against Wycombe for Bournemouth last year. When substituted he gave a barracking section of the crowd a brace of V signs. I doubt whether that would happen at the Cardiff club, the players seem to have more respect for

each other, their manager and supporters. Manager Gordon Jago certainly has problems.

As for Jimmy Andrews — a shrewd manager if ever there was one — things look particularly rosy. His side are a good bet for promotion.

Whenever one goes on a 'spying' mission, one of the main tasks is obviously to fathom out any weakness. It is difficult to see many in this Cardiff team, but one or two flaws did appear.

Goalkeeper Bill Irwin, who is vying for a regular place, with former Manchester City keeper Ron Healey, looked a little suspect on crosses, preferring to punch on occasions. Left back Clive Charles was beaten a couple of times on the flank which enabled Trevor Lee to get over dangerous crosses. That, I'm afraid, is about the lot!

In contrast, City have a whole host of strengths. Arthur Lar-

mour for instance makes up for any lack of pace in the centre of defence by playing a sweeper's role. In midfield there is Welsh international Gil Reece, who scored two of the goals at Millwall. He is a similar player to Martin Peters, stealing up into scoring positions almost unnoticed. His goal tally over the years must make him one of the main dangers. Then there is the front three who have been previously mentioned.

Will Cardiff play it differently at home? I think the answer is probably yes. Anderson dropped back to make a fourth midfield player early on at the Den and I anticipate him well upfield hugging the flanks tomorrow.

In many ways Cardiff are comparable to the Peterborough United side that came to Wycombe two years ago. Both are full of confidence, both are on the crest of a wave and both come forward at speed.

That's why I rate Cardiff as a bigger threat than Middlesbrough last season. When the 'Boro' came to Loakes Park they were determined not to lose at all costs. Cardiff will take a different attitude. They will expect to win and win well for they know they have everything going for them.

The Blues lost 3-1 at home to the 'Posh' with arguably a better side than they have at the moment. If they go down by a similar scoreline tomorrow, they won't have done badly.